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News Release

DOZENS CHARGED IN INTERNATIONAL, INTERNET-BASED CHILD PORNOGRAPHY INVESTIGATION

‘Chat Room’ Allegedly Used to Trade Images of Child Sexual Molestation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A private Internet “chat room” used worldwide to facilitate the trading of thousands of images of child pornography – including streaming videos of live molestations – was infiltrated in an undercover investigation, resulting in charges against 27 individuals to date in the United States, Canada, Australia and Great Britain, the Department of Justice, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and cooperating international authorities announced today.

This week, indictments and criminal complaints were unsealed in nine U.S. judicial districts in Illinois, Tennessee, Michigan, Nevada, Florida, New York, Arizona and Hawaii, as well as in state court in North Carolina, charging 13 defendants with various offenses including possession, receipt, distribution and manufacture of child pornography. The additional 14 defendants have been charged in other countries – nine in Canada, three in Australia and two in Great Britain – in connection with activity in the chat room known as “Kiddypics & Kiddyvids,” which was hosted on the Internet through the WinMX software program that also allowed users to engage in “peer-to-peer” file sharing. One of the 27 charged defendants is a fugitive.

Seven child victims of sexual molestation have been identified as a result of the investigation, and four alleged molesters are among the 27 defendants charged to date in the continuing investigation. Details of the international investigation and the criminal charges were unveiled at a news conference in Chicago by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales, Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Julie L. Myers, and Deputy Chief of the Toronto Police Service Tony Warr.

“This international undercover investigation revealed an insidious network that engaged in worldwide trafficking in child pornography, including live molestations of children transmitted over the Internet,” said Attorney General Gonzales. “We will continue to work side-by-side with our international law enforcement partners to shut down these rings and protect young, vulnerable victims.”

“Molestation ‘on demand’ and an ever-younger and more defenseless group of child victims are two of the most disturbing trends ICE investigators see when they infiltrate child pornography rings. This case had both,” said Assistant Secretary Myers. “I’m so pleased that international law enforcement cooperation has taken down this child pornography ring. Thanks to our cooperative efforts, those who engage in this horrific behavior will not be allowed to roam unchallenged through cyberspace.”

“The Toronto Police Service is proud to have played a role in an investigation of this magnitude and international scope,” said Deputy Chief Warr. “The Child Exploitation Tracking System made a significant link in the project and led us to work cooperatively with our law enforcement partners across Canada and in the U.S., U.K., and Australia.”

In Chicago, three defendants were charged with conspiracy to possess, receive, solicit and distribute child pornography in a seven-count indictment returned yesterday by a federal grand jury in the Northern District of Illinois. A fourth defendant was charged separately in a related indictment. The conspiracy indictment against Brian A. Annoreno, of Bartlett, Illinois, Gregory J. Sweezer, of Aurora, Illinois, and Lisa A. Winebrenner, of Osceola, Iowa, alleges that they – together with the other 24 individuals, all using screen names – accessed the chat room from computers around the world and participated in the chat room through chats and file-sharing.

An investigation by ICE and Canadian law enforcement determined that, since at least April 2005 through March 10, 2006, Winebrenner, Annoreno and Sweezer allegedly conspired with each other and others to trade images of child pornography through their participation in the “Kiddypics & Kiddyids” chat room. The other participants, while not charged in Chicago, face either pending child pornography charges in the United States or abroad or have already been prosecuted in Canada or England.

According to the Chicago indictment, the chat room was maintained by a “host” and various “administrators” selected by the host, each of whom had special privileges in administering the room, including establishing rules for participants and determining which individuals were allowed to participate. The primary host of the chat room allegedly was a user with the screen name “G.O.D.” – later identified as Royal Raymond Weller, of Clarksville, Tennessee, who was arrested on March 6, 2006 on child pornography charges in a criminal complaint in the Middle District of Tennessee.

The indictment alleges that administrators of the chat room included:

- Winebrenner, who used the screen name “HumbleDuchess;”
- “CuLeX,” later identified as Jason Wilson, of Milton, Fla., who was arrested and charged with possession of child pornography in a criminal complaint in the Northern District of Florida;
- “Wharfrat,” later identified as Michael Burns, of Reno, Nevada, who was arrested and charged with possession of child pornography in the District of Nevada;
- “Lord Newbie,” later identified as Kenneth Fisher, of Charlotte, North Carolina, who was arrested on state charges in North Carolina;
- “Fydei,” later identified as Marcel Deslauriers, of Longueuil, Quebec, who was arrested and charged in Canada; and
- “Sir_CP,” later identified as a 65-year-old man from Mill Park, Victoria, Australia; and “DarcBiocode,” later identified as a 22-year-old man from Stafford, Queensland, Australia.

As part of the conspiracy alleged in the Chicago indictment, some participants used minors to produce images of child pornography that were available to other participants, including by

means of streaming video, which was exchanged privately through online instant messenger services. For example, last year, Annoreno – who used the screen name “Acidburn” – allegedly used an infant identified as Minor A to produce live streaming video of himself sexually molesting the infant. Also in April 2005, “Big_daddy619” used four minors under the age of 12 to produce live streaming videos of him sexually molesting all four children, which he transmitted live, via the Internet, to other chat room members including Annoreno, who allegedly received the images.

The indictment further alleges that Winebrenner used a software program to destroy evidence on her computer that she possessed child pornography. On March 10, Winebrenner allegedly advised others through an online discussion to destroy any such images.

The conspiracy count alleges that on Feb. 11, 2006, Sweezer distributed two video images of child pornography to an individual whom he believed was a participant in the chat room, but who in fact was an ICE agent who had assumed the identity of a chat room participant to conduct the undercover investigation. The indictment alleges that the chat room participants used security measures to conceal their activities and child pornography collections from law enforcement, including screening persons in the chat room, removing individuals suspected of being affiliated with law enforcement, prohibiting participants from soliciting any personal identifying information from one another, and using encryption and data destruction software to protect stored child pornography files.

ICE Offices of Investigation in the following cities conducted the investigation: Chicago; Pensacola and Ft. Pierce, Florida; Buffalo, New York; Phoenix; Nashville, Tennessee; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Reno, Nevada; Charlotte, North Carolina; Des Moines, Iowa; Honolulu, Hawaii; and San Antonio, Texas. In addition, state and local authorities in North Carolina and state and local authorities in Illinois – including the Illinois Attorney General’s Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, the Lake County State’s Attorney’s Office, and the Police Departments in Aurora, North Aurora and Bartlett, Illinois – assisted in the investigation..

Numerous law enforcement agencies from other countries cooperated in this investigation, including: the Toronto Police Service, the Edmonton Police Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ontario Provincial Police, the York Regional Police, the Suret du Quebec, the British Columbia and Manitoba Integrated Child Exploitation Units, the United Kingdom National Crime Squad, the London Metropolitan Police Pedophile Unit, the Australian Federal Police and the Queensland (Australia) Police Service.

In the United States, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation assisted in the investigation. The following U.S. Attorney’s Offices are prosecuting cases resulting from this investigation: The Northern District of Illinois, the Southern District of Florida, the Northern District of Florida, the District of Hawaii, the Western District of New York, the District of Arizona, the Middle District of Tennessee, the District of Nevada and the Western District of Michigan. The Southern District of Iowa has also assisted in the matter.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.